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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on  
THURSDAY 19 JUNE 1986  
at 10.00 am

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Tom King MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP  
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon Lord Young of Graffham  
Secretary of State for Employment

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP  
Secretary of State for Education and Science

The Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke QC MP  
Paymaster General

The Rt Hon John MacGregor MP  
Chief Secretary, Treasury

The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon John Wakeham MP  
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

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SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong  
Mr D F Williamson (Items 2 and 3)  
Mr C L G Mallaby (Items 2 and 3)  
Mr A J Langdon (Item 1)  
Mr M J Eland (Item 1)

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PARLIAMENTARY  
AFFAIRS

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

Invalid Care  
Allowance

Previous  
Reference:  
CC(86) 17.3

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES said that under legislation introduced in 1976, invalid care allowance was paid to men and single women who were unable to work because they had to spend more than 35 hours a week caring for a severely disabled person in receipt of an attendance allowance. The then Labour Government had, however, specifically excluded married women who formed the largest group of carers, on grounds of cost and because in many cases they would not have given up work in order to undertake care. This exclusion had been challenged in the European Court of Justice as contravening the European Community Directive on Equal Treatment in social security matters. As he had previously reported to Cabinet, the Advocate General had produced in April an Opinion to the effect that the exclusion did indeed contravene the Directive. The full Court was now to give its judgment on Tuesday 24 June and it was fully expected to confirm the Advocate General's Opinion. Since the Advocate General's Opinion had been received he had been considering the implications with the Chief Secretary, Treasury. Straightforward extension of the allowance to married women would have an annual cost of some £55 million a year plus a once-and-for-all cost of some £100 million in backpayments which would be dated from when the Equal Treatment Directive had come into force in December 1984. They had explored a number of options which might limit the cost but had concluded that none of these was feasible. The position was complicated by the fact that an all-party amendment designed to achieve straightforward extension of the allowance to married women had been put down to the Social Security Bill in the House of Lords. This was virtually certain to be carried. In these circumstances he had concluded that the best course for the Government to take was to pre-empt both the Court judgment and the Lords amendment by bringing forward its own amendment to extend the allowance. Subject to the views of colleagues, he proposed to make an oral statement to that effect on the following day. The alternative was to await the Court judgment; but in the meantime the Lords amendment might be carried and the Government would have lost the initiative.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a short discussion, said that it was regrettable that public expenditure decisions should be pre-empted by a court in this way, but that the Cabinet endorsed the Secretary of State for Social Services' view that in the circumstances the best approach was for the Government to table its own amendment extending the allowance to married women.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note, with approval of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion and invited the Secretary of State for Social Services to proceed accordingly.

Report of the  
Inquiry into  
the Conduct  
of Local  
Authority  
Business

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT said that the Report would be published that day of the Committee set up in February 1985 under the chairmanship of Mr David Widdicombe QC to inquire into the conduct of local authority business. It was a substantial document with over 88 recommendations and was formidably comprehensive in its approach. Rather than working up counter-measures to extreme abuses, which did not happen in most authorities, it took a systematic view of practice and procedure across local government as a whole and recommended a comprehensive structure of interlocking and detailed statutory controls. This conflicted with the Government's approach of improving the accountability of local authorities to their electorate and relying on this, rather than detailed statutory prescription, to regulate their activity. He therefore intended to accompany publication of the Report by a low-key Written Answer saying simply that the Government welcomed the Report, proposed to express no views at that stage but would welcome comments upon it. He would consider the Report further in the light of the public response.

The Cabinet

- 2. Took note.

Radioactive  
Contamination  
of Sheepmeat

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that when the cloud of radioactive fall-out from the nuclear power disaster in Chernobyl had passed over the United Kingdom during the weekend of 2-3 May there had been heavy rainfall in Northern England and Wales and parts of Scotland and some pasture land had been contaminated. As part of the Government response to the incident there had been monitoring of radio-caesium levels in sheep and cattle. The "trigger level" at which action should be contemplated had been taken as 1,000 becquerels per kilogram (Bq/kg). On 11 June recordings above this level were identified in North Wales in two very young lambs not yet ready for marketing. As a result the Secretary of State for Wales had initiated a series of special tests on 13 June in which lambs from 20 farms in North Wales had been sampled. The testing had been conducted by Amersham International. This had established abnormal levels of radio-caesium both in marketable lambs and in lambs as yet too young to be marketable. Among marketable lambs this had in no case exceeded the 1,000 Bq/kg level, although in some cases it had come close to it. The reason for the high levels of radio-caesium amongst very young lambs appeared to be their different metabolism and the fact that they had eaten contaminated pasture at a time of high intake in relation to their bodyweight. Radio-caesium levels in lambs, however, approximately halved over a 50-day period. In the light of all this information he and the Secretary of State for Wales had concluded that it would be necessary to make an Order under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 prohibiting the movement and slaughter of sheep and lambs within two areas in North Wales and Cumbria, where high levels had also been recorded. This would allow monitoring of young sheep and lambs to ensure that there was no

marketing of those with a radio-caesium level above 1,000 bq/kg and that levels fell as expected. Without such an Order there was a risk that lambs would be moved out of the areas in question - for example, for fattening in the lowlands - and would not subsequently be traceable. He was holding a meeting that afternoon with the Ministers most concerned to finalise the action to be taken and the intention was to lay the Order on the following day.

In discussion the following points were made -

a. The Government should be entirely open about the problem and should act promptly to deal with it. There was clearly a substantial risk of public over-reaction to the problem, and the effect on sales of lamb, both for home consumption and export, could be serious; but any attempt to avoid this by suppressing information and delaying action would be wrong, and would be likely only to cause greater problems in the long-term.

b. It was critically important to emphasise that there was no health risk from sheepmeat already on sale in the shops and that the measures being taken were cautious in the extreme. The actual consequences of eating meat with high radio-caesium levels should be spelt out in simple layman's terms. It was understood, for example, that for eating meat with a radio-caesium level of 1,000 bq/kg to prove dangerous to life it would have to be the main component of an individual's diet for a year. This point should be put across clearly and forcefully.

c. Despite the most careful presentation there was still likely to be widespread public alarm and the consequences for farmers could be serious. The question of compensation needed to be considered urgently.

d. The announcement was bound to be exploited to the full by the anti-nuclear power lobby which would stress that these measures were being taken as a consequence of a nuclear accident in a far-off country, and would use this to stimulate alarm at the potential consequences of a nuclear accident within the United Kingdom.

e. There was an awkward problem of presentation in that the level fixed for prohibiting imports of meat into the European Community from Eastern Europe was 600 bq/kg. There was, however, no scientific basis for such a low level, while the level of 1,000 bq/kg had been recommended by scientists meeting under the auspices of the Euratom Treaty.

f. Similar tests to those being undertaken in England and Wales would also be conducted in Scotland and Northern Ireland. There could be criticism that no Restriction Order was made in respect of Scotland: lambs came on the market much later in Scotland than in England and Wales.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Cabinet were agreed that the Government must act openly and quickly to deal with the problem. The details of the action to be taken should be considered further that afternoon by the Ministers most concerned taking account of the points raised in discussion. Most careful consideration would need to be given to handling and presentation. In particular, the statement should make clear that all meat currently on sale in the shops was safe; that tests had shown that some lambs which would not be ready for marketing for several weeks might at that time conceivably have radio-caesium levels above the very stringent safety levels adopted in this country and that to prevent any risk of such lambs being marketed the Government had taken extreme precautionary measures. So far as possible the facts should be presented in simple layman's language, with telling illustrative examples. An oral statement should be made in Parliament on the following day when the Order would be laid. A press conference would follow. A simple fact sheet should be issued to backbenchers.

The Cabinet

3. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion and invited the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales to proceed accordingly.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Relations between France and New Zealand

2. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that an announcement was expected that day that France and New Zealand had agreed to refer the affair of the Greenpeace ship "Rainbow Warrior", which had been sunk in Auckland Harbour on 10 July 1985, to the United Nations Secretary-General for arbitration. It was possible that France and New Zealand had already reached some kind of private accommodation, which now would be blessed by the Secretary-General.

Arms Control

Previous Reference:  
CC(86) 23.2

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, had made a speech in Moscow on 16 June in which he had revealed some elements of recent Soviet proposals in the Geneva negotiations with the United States on arms control in the fields of nuclear weapons and space. The Soviet Union had not published the details of those proposals; this might be an indication of interest in negotiation rather than only propaganda. The central point of the Soviet proposals was a link between reductions in strategic arms with clarification of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and agreement that neither side would withdraw from that Treaty for fifteen years. This approach was not dissimilar from ideas put by the Prime Minister to the President of the United States in February 1986. The chief United States negotiator in

Geneva had authority to explore the Soviet proposals. The public handling of the matter by the United States as well as the Soviet Union was encouraging; the Secretary of Defense, Mr Caspar Weinberger, had not spoken out against the latest proposals. It was important that the negotiations in Geneva should now go forward; the United States response to the Soviet proposals would be of major significance.

South Africa

Previous

Reference:

CC(86) 23.2

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the South African Government had prevented the media from reporting events in that country on 16 June, the tenth anniversary of the riots in Soweto. The number of persons detained on this occasion was estimated at 2,000. There had been a very widespread one day strike by the black population. Eleven deaths had been reported, but there might have been more. The attitude of the South African Government to the international community was becoming increasingly belligerent. In the United Nations Security Council, the United Kingdom had just joined the United States in vetoing, for the second time within a month, a resolution calling for mandatory sanctions against South Africa. On this occasion the resolution had been concerned with the South African raid against Angola on 6 June. More such resolutions were likely to be passed when South Africa carried out raids on neighbouring countries. France had abstained on this occasion, as on the previous one. Meanwhile, in the United States House of Representatives a surprisingly far-reaching resolution had just been passed, calling for a near total embargo on trade with and investment in South Africa. The United States Senate would no doubt take a different position, and the Administration still wished to resist far-reaching measures against South Africa. Nevertheless, it might be more difficult than in the past for the allies of the United States to restrain the Administration from accepting significant measures. When the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Community had met on 18 June, the United Kingdom with help from some others had secured agreement that no decisions should then be taken to adopt measures against South Africa. There would now be pressure in the Community itself, notably at the meeting in the following week of the European Council, and in the Commonwealth and in the United Nations for further measures. A group of Ministers was considering British policy; it was desirable to minimise confrontation at the European Council and also to preserve room for manoeuvre at the meeting of certain Commonwealth Heads of Government in London from 3-5 August. The Government would work for an agreed approach among the Western industrialised countries. There would inevitably be a period of political difficulty for the Government domestically and in foreign relations. The presentation of the Government's position would be of the highest importance. The Government should make clear its abhorrence of apartheid and draw attention to its efforts over the years in favour of reform in South Africa. The Government should say that it wanted to see fundamental change achieved in South Africa through negotiation and wanted negotiation to resume as soon as possible. The Government should point out that the United Kingdom had already taken significant measures against South Africa, indeed more than any other industrialised country.

The Government should say that it was considering its position on means of helping to promote reform in South Africa.

In discussion it was pointed out that the Federal Republic of Germany was at present taking a firm position against far-reaching measures in the European Community; Portugal shared the British position, but was not an important participant in the discussion; and Italy was not adopting a high profile. As for France, the President, Monsieur Francois Mitterrand, favoured further measures, and the Prime Minister, Monsieur Jacques Chirac, who had formerly been against further measures, seemed to be changing his position somewhat, because of pressure from the Francophone countries in Africa and because he had been impressed by the views of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. France was likely to adopt a position closer to that of the United Kingdom than it would have under the previous Socialist Government but not necessarily an identical position.

Supplementary  
Extradition  
Treaty  
Between the  
United States  
and the  
United  
Kingdom

Previous  
Reference:  
CC(86) 18.2

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND said that the proposed Supplementary Extradition Treaty between the United States and the United Kingdom, which earlier had been opposed by a significant number of the members of the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate, had been passed by that Committee by a majority of 15 to 2. The major hurdle on the way to approval of the Treaty by the United States Congress had thus been successfully passed. The Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Irish Republic, Mr Sean Donlon, had told him that three of the senators who had decided at the end of the day to support the Treaty had been persuaded to do so by the Irish Government. This showed that, while the Government of the Irish Republic had not been willing to be seen to support the Treaty, it had not been inactive behind the scenes in the final phase.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

COMMUNITY  
AFFAIRS

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Preparation  
for the  
European  
Council

3. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the Council of Ministers (Foreign Affairs) on 16-17 June had carried forward the preparation for the European Council on 26-27 June. There would be substantial discussion of the South African situation and of nuclear issues in the light of the accident at Chernobyl. There would be firm support from France and, to a less extent, the Federal Republic of Germany on the need to avoid a Community nuclear safety inspectorate. The Council reached agreement on its response to the announcement by the United States that they intended to impose unilateral measures against some Community exports because of the assumed effect of Spanish accession on United States cereal exports to Spain. This response would consist of equivalent counter-measures if the United States did impose new restrictions but a determined attempt to arrive at a negotiated

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settlement in the interim. At the Council there had also been further difficulty from the Greek Government on relations with Turkey. The Greeks would continue to make such difficulties in further discussion. The Council had, however, decided to fix a meeting of the association Council with Turkey in September.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

19 June 1986

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